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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 9475
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 2422
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 2929
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4839
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 6010
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000549

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that on Tuesday security forces thwarted a large-scale terrorist attack planned for Tuesday evening at Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station. Forces arrested a Palestinian resident of the West Bank and three other people at a house in Bat Yam, a

southern Tel Aviv suburb, after receiving intelligence information from the Shin Bet. Media quoted a senior member of Islamic Jihad as saying that the group had planned the attack and had sent one of their militants execute it. Two of the other Palestinians arrested at the Bat Yam house were identified as collaborators and all three were illegally residing in Israel. Following his arrest in Bat Yam, the suspect led investigators to the nearby city of Rishon Lezion, where, for an unknown reason, he had hidden a bag filled with explosives. Police were quoted as saying that the suspect confessed to planning to carry out an attack. He had apparently set out Tuesday morning from the Jenin area with the bag of explosives. It is not clear whether the Palestinians arrested along with the suspect had been aware of his plan to carry out an attack.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz, leader of Israel's team in the strategic dialogue with the US, told the newspaper on the eve of the expiration of the UN ultimatum to Iran requiring it cease uranium enrichment or face further sanctions, that the world must let the Iranian leadership see its determination to impose far-reaching sanctions that could eventually harm Iran and its enemies. Mofaz, who served in the past both as the army's Chief of Staff and as defense minister, stopped well short, however, of advocating military action. Ha'aretz reported that the Bush administration is planning to propose a new resolution against Iran at the UN Security Council that will call for stepping up sanctions against Tehran in an effort to thwart its nuclear ambitions. Ha'aretz quoted political sources in Jerusalem as saying on Tuesday that the US will seek to include a partial embargo on arms sales in the resolution, with particular emphasis on the types of weapons that can be used by terrorists. Ha'aretz quoted the Jerusalem-based sources as saying that there is no chance for a total arms embargo on Iran, because of Russian opposition to it. Russia has sold air-defense missiles to Iran for the defense of its nuclear installations. The Jerusalem Post reported that Monday's decision by PM Ehud Olmert to extend Meir Dagan's term as head of the Mossad until the end of 2008 is a significant indication that at least on two fronts -- the Iranian nuclear program and Syria -- Israeli policy is holding fast.

The Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic sources as saying in Jerusalem on Tuesday that Israel is not expecting any fundamental changes in the Quartet's position toward the PA at a meeting of the Quartet principals in Berlin today meant as a follow up to Monday's trilateral meeting.

Based on news agency reports, Ha'aretz wrote that on Tuesday Jordan's King Abdullah II pressed the US to step up its mediation role to broker a Palestinian-Israeli peace accord. The monarch, who made his statement after separate meetings with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas, said Washington's role was crucial to jump-start negotiations. "The people of the region are looking toward Washington continuing to play a major role in the peace process by creating the necessary environment for a resumption of negotiations on the basis of the two-state solution outlined in the Arab peace initiative and the Middle East road map," a statement released by Jordan's palace was quoted as saying. Citing news agency stories, Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post quoted Abbas as saying on Monday that his talks with Secretary Rice and PM Olmert were tense and difficult, but not a

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failure.

Maariv cited an intelligence report compiled by the Foreign Ministry, which found that over the past few weeks the camp of extremist Mideast states headed by Iran has weakened, while the group of moderate states including Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia has been strengthening.

Maariv reported that the Israeli defense establishment plans to significantly increase its array of Arrow missiles across the country.

Yediot reported that the gap between the views of IDF Intelligence and Defense Minister Amir Peretz regarding Hizbullah's military capability is purely semantic: Israel believes that Hizbullah currently possesses over 10,000 short-range rockets in southern Lebanon and north of the Litani River. Most of them have been there

since before the war. Israel believes that small quantities of rockets are being smuggled into southern Lebanon, but that Hizbulah

large arsenals are in Syrian territory, and that during a critical diplomatic time, Syria might "turn the flow of arms into a flood." Ha'aretz cited Reuters as saying that on Tuesday the US Treasury Department designated a Lebanon-based construction company operated by Hizbulah as a terrorist organization, accusing it of bolstering the militant group's public standing by rebuilding war-torn areas. The action by the Treasury bans Americans from doing business with Jihad al-Bina and freezes any assets the construction firm may have under US jurisdiction. The Treasury said Jihad al-Bina receives direct funding from Iran, is run by Hizbulah members, and is overseen by Hizbulah's governing Shura Council.

Yediot reported that Egypt has proposed to Israel and the US that a deep moat be dug along the "Philadelphi route" along the Gaza-Egypt border and filled with water in order to stop massive smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that three young American women who were kidnapped in Nablus on Tuesday by Hadi Masud, an armed Palestinian -- a former PFLP militant -- were released a few hours later. Ha'aretz reported that the release was effected in negotiations with Palestinian security forces.

Ha'aretz reported that three Iraqi children and their parents were issued visas this week in order to receive medical treatment here. The children, aged 1, 7 and 14, are expected to arrive soon via Jordan. An Interior Ministry statement released on Tuesday said that since the start of the fighting in Iraq, many Iraqi families have sought medical care in Israel. "We fear the security problems these cases could create but the health of the children is the overriding priority," the ministry was quoted as saying. The children are being brought to Israel by Save a Child's Heart, an Israeli non-profit organization.

Maariv and The Jerusalem Post reported that the "new version" of the legendary radio station The Voice of Peace, called RAM FM 93.6, will start broadcasting from Ramallah and Tel Aviv today. Issie Kirsh, a Jewish South African millionaire, is funding the program.

Retired judge Vardi Zeiler was quoted as saying on Sunday, in an interview with Ha'aretz, following a "damning" report on police and prosecution malfeasance by the inquiry committee he headed, that Israel could be on its way to resembling Sicily.

Ha'aretz quoted associates of Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu as saying on Tuesday that oligarch Arkady Gaidamak's decision -- expected to be officially issued today -- to set up his own party was not coordinated with Netanyahu, and that Netanyahu was not even informed of it in advance. Leading media had quoted senior Likud members as saying that Gaidamak is a senior partner of their party.

Ha'aretz reported that Google has formally launched the AdSense ad program for content sites in Hebrew. The program, already translated into many languages, enables site owners to add Google text advertisements to the Internet sites.

Ha'aretz reported that reputed organized crime figure Zeev Rosenstein will return to Israel early next month, where he will be sent to one of the country's high-security prisons. The State Prosecutor's Office informed the Israel Prison Service to expect Rosenstein within a few weeks. Ha'aretz said that Israel and the US are tying up loose ends before Rosenstein can be returned to Israel.

He is expected to spend the next 12 years behind bars, in accordance with a plea bargain signed in Florida in January. Under the agreement, Rosenstein pleaded guilty to conspiring to smuggle 700,000 Ecstasy (MDMA) pills from Europe to the US instead of standing trial on charges of smuggling millions of pills.

Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Maintenance and preserving the diplomatic momentum are also important, even when the circumstances make real progress difficult to attain."

Yehiel Leiter, who was bureau chief of former finance minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in NRG, the Internet site of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "The common denominator between [Jimmy] Carter's accusations and the classic blood libel is deep and fundamental.... But the real source of the Middle East's trouble is the ideology of jihad, the holy war that sanctifies bloodshed, which glorifies murderers and educates children to die as shahids."

Contributor Prof. Gerald Steinberg, who heads the Program on Conflict Management at Bar-Ilan University and is the Executive Director of NGO Monitor, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Israel, as a vibrant democracy, does not need, and should not be the target of 'civil society initiatives' engineered by foreign governments, whether well-meaning or hostile."

Block Quotes:

II. "Maintenance Is Also Important"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/21): "Those who support direct dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and who value American involvement in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict should welcome US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's insistence on holding Monday's trilateral summit in Jerusalem.... First, Rice demonstrated that she is true to her word and ready to invest time and effort in advancing the two-state solution, even when the chances for progress are small and she is vulnerable to criticism in Washington over the very fact that she came here. Second, the Secretary of State's frequent visits to Jerusalem enable Olmert to maintain the cease-fire in the Gaza Strip and help him repulse pressure for the army and government to embark on a large-scale military operation in Gaza. Third, Rice's presence in the room obliges Olmert and Abbas to reaffirm their commitment to the Roadmap process and presses Israel to ease the economic distress of Palestinians in the territories, albeit slowly.... From Rice's perspective, the visit to Jerusalem was a good opportunity to get a close-up of the political crises in Israel and the PA and to obtain first-hand information, rather than mere reports from her staff. Maintenance and preserving the diplomatic momentum are also important, even when the circumstances make real progress difficult to attain."

II. "Modern Blood Libels"

Yehiel Leiter, who was bureau chief of former finance minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in NRG, the Internet site of the popular, pluralist Maariv (2/21): "The blood libel revived by Professor Ariel Toaff, in his scandalous book 'Bloody Passovers,' immediately found a place of dishonor in anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi sites around the world. This is a particularly infuriating case, since Toaff is Jewish and a professor at an Israeli university.... But versus [such] libels, there are also more sophisticated ones. A prominent contemporary example is the book of former US President Jimmy Carter, 'Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid'.... No one knows better than Carter that Israel is far from being an apartheid state. Beyond his regional involvement as president decades ago, Carter recently headed a team of international monitors who supervised the elections in the Palestinian Authority. Is it reasonable to call a state that permits an enemy calling for its destruction to come to power in free elections, an 'apartheid state'? However, accusations such as those appearing in Carter's book fall upon attentive ears, and universities around the world hold 'Israeli Apartheid Week'.... The common denominator between Carter's accusations and the classic blood libel is deep and fundamental. In both, Israel or the Jew are the sole source of everyone's troubles, and the solution lies in eradicating them. But the real source of the Middle East's trouble is the ideology of jihad, the holy war that sanctifies bloodshed, which glorifies murderers and educates children to die as shahids. This is not a libel; it is a fact that has been demonstrated not

only in the Middle East, but also in Bali, Chechnya, India, London, Madrid, and New York. Israel must expose the modern blood libel and beware of becoming convinced, like Toaff, by the words of its persecutors. But the removal of the guilt is not enough. There is need for a real victory over an enemy who knows not the meaning of compromise."

III. "Manipulating 'Civil Society'"

Contributor Prof. Gerald Steinberg, who heads the Program on Conflict Management at Bar-Ilan University and is the Executive Director of NGO Monitor, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/21): "When foreign governments team up with and provide financial support to private Israeli groups in order to oppose policies that are set by democratically elected leaders, this is a problem. It is also a violation of sovereignty, and a clear example of neocolonialism. Nevertheless, the recent discovery that the British Embassy in Tel Aviv is funding an Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) known as 'Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights' --- is not surprising. The ostensible focus of the 'research' is on the impact of the security barrier on Palestinian villages caught in the middle, and since Bimkom is a political organization, the outcome is a forgone conclusion. In this way, the British government will receive an analysis from an Israeli group that supports London's position against the route of the barrier.... In democratic societies, government officials who provide funds to these entities generally use this as a means to promote their own interests and objectives, without checks and balances or transparency. In closed non-democratic societies, such as Syria, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority, foreign government assistance for NGOs that promote democracy, tolerance, and human rights may have a positive impact, but only if this support is carefully monitored to prevent abuse. Europe's failure to provide such monitoring exacerbates the damage. Israel, as a vibrant democracy, does not need, and should not be the target of 'civil society initiatives' engineered by foreign governments, whether well-meaning or hostile. From this perspective, the example of Bimkom, the security barrier, and the British Embassy is small but highly illustrative. The time has come to end this misguided and patronizing policy."

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